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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA

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INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0141

RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2366

RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002132

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR OVIP NI

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT YAR'ADUA FLIES YET AGAIN TO SAUDI ARABIA  
FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT

REF: A. ABUJA 1475 (NOTAL)

1B. ABUJA 1760 (NOTAL)

1C. ABUJA 1945 (NOTAL)

1D. ABUJA 1962 (NOTAL)

1E. USUN NEW YORK 1035 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty  
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Summary. President Yar'Adua has flown again to Saudi Arabia for reported medical attention, which will fuel already robust speculation about his apparently deteriorating health and his intentions for the 2011 election. End Summary.

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HEAD OF STATE FLIES TO SAUDI ARABIA -- AGAIN  
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12. (C) Foreign Minister Maduekwe confirmed to Ambassador press reports that President Yar'Adua had traveled to Saudi Arabia for the third time in five months, reportedly for medical attention. Press reporting on his travel apparently triggered a false rumor in other channels that Yar'Adua had died. Local papers carried photos of Yar'Adua looking gaunt and frail.

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NIGERIAN PRESIDENT'S HEALTH HAS DETERIORATED  
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13. (C) Yar'Adua's travel comes amid mounting speculation about his health. Presidential Advisor Sani Musa claimed to PolCouns November 19 that Yar'Adua stated in a private meeting four days earlier that he leaned against running for re-election in 2011 because of declining health. Musa, who had earlier told PolCouns that the President's health had improved somewhat from earlier this year (ref D), described the President as much more thin and frail in recent weeks, with his veins more visibly pronounced ("popping out") than before. As evidence of his boss's declining health and weakness, Musa said 30 foreign ambassadors currently awaited appointments to present their credentials, and Yar'Adua had recently asked the Secretary to the Government of the

Federation (SGF), who runs the nation's day-to-day affairs, to postpone a trip to Washington because of health issues.

¶4. (C) Musa added that Yar'Adua also said that former President Obasanjo asked Yar'Adua three times whether he planned to run for re-election and that Yar'Adua had replied negatively all three times. Musa remarked that Yar'Adua was under intense pressure from the country's southern politicians to run again because they feared that selection of another northern candidate would push back the election of the next southern president by an additional four years. Musa claimed that Yar'Adua remained engaged in discreet consultations on his party's next standard bearer if he decided not to run for re-election. Musa predicted that Yar'Adua would defer a decision until April or May 2010 to prevent being perceived as a lame-duck president.

¶5. (C) Also on November 24, a well-connected GON Protocol Officer told PolOff that Yar'Adua had flown to Saudi Arabia for "emergency" medical treatment and did not plan to run for another term. Separately, the French Defense Attaché told Embassy Defense Attaché that he could "confirm" that Yar'Adua QEmbassy Defense Attaché that he could "confirm" that Yar'Adua "collapsed" on November 23, which precipitated his travel to Saudi Arabia with a large team of German doctors. Per ref E, Obasanjo told the USUN Permanent Representative that someone from the North other than Yar'Adua should run in 2011, noting that Yar'Adua had once again started receiving dialysis.

¶6. (C) In the Ambassador's two most recent meetings with Yar'Adua, she noted that he looked extremely weak, paper

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thin, frail, with deep-set eyes, and was missing teeth on his right side. In both cases he struggled, walking very slowly and deliberately, indicating that movement was difficult.

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COMMENT  
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¶7. (C) Since his inauguration in 2007, health issues have weighed heavily on the image and performance of Nigeria's head of state. His latest trip to Saudi Arabia will only intensify speculation regarding his health and intentions. A decision by Yar'Adua not to seek re-election would set off intense jockeying, particularly among Northern politicians, for the People's Democratic Party presidential nomination.  
END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) Embassy coordinated this telegram with ConGen Lagos.

SANDERS